

The Role of Djinn in Human Salvation

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I would like to give a presentation here that will be quite generalist in nature about the role of the jinn, because I have come to think that they are actually much more important—not only in magical practices, of course, but also in theology itself.

For many years, while teaching Islamic studies, I had always tended to say: you know, the jinn exist, they are mentioned in the Quran, but ultimately, they have a very marginal existence from a theological point of view. It is not an important topic. In fact, according to Muslim theologians, it is best not to focus on them. But over the years, I realized that their role is not so marginal after all, first because the Quran speaks of them frequently, and of course, for believers, the fact that divine speech mentions the jinn so often is meaningful.

Additionally, I believe that the jinn also have a role in the religious behavior of Muslims. This role can be both internal and external. My objective today is to show how the jinn are beings that exist outside of humans, yet in a way, they are also internal to them. They function in both dimensions.

I will begin by briefly recalling that the jinn are parallel populations, twin in a sense, to humanity. Then, I will explore how the existence of the jinn reflects the internal conflict that religious faith generates within each believer.

To summarize facts you may already know, the Quran speaks extensively about the jinn as an obvious reality, something that falls within everyone's experience. These beliefs originate from traditional Arab traditions, but they are reinforced by the mention of the jinn in the Quran. The presumed etymology of "jinn" suggests that they are "hidden populations." However, they are hidden in a way that people still frequently encounter, as attested by the Quran, the Hadith, and Arabic and Islamic literature.

The Quran explicitly states that God created both kinds: He created humans and jinn to worship Him. He sent prophets to both humans and jinn. There are verses—though I will not cite them here—that make this clear. Past peoples have disbelieved among both humans and jinn and have been punished for it. The Quran mentions that Solomon's army included both humans and jinn.

Humans and jinn will be gathered together on the Day of Judgment, sharing in the astonishment of resurrection. They are associated in various other contexts, such as their shared inability to produce a surah like those of the Quran, or their common potential to fly through the air, though only by divine permission. They are also connected in other ways, such as in the possibility of having relations with the houris.

This association—the fact that God addresses both humans and jinn—clearly shows that they are neighboring communities sharing the same destiny. The fact that they are tied to the same fate highlights the importance of exploring what constitutes the common ground between these two species.

The key foundational texts on this topic include Surah 72 (Al-Jinn), which describes the Prophet's interactions with the jinn. Additionally, the Hadith and the Sira mention the coexistence of jinn and humans, including Muslim jinn living alongside Muslim humans.

For example, there is a hadith stating that Arabs should not wipe themselves with bones or dung after relieving themselves because bones serve as food for the jinn, and dung feeds the jinn's livestock. Out of respect for their "brothers among the jinn," they should avoid doing so. This idea—that the jinn are truly the brothers of humankind—is a key point that should be emphasized.

There are numerous hadiths that describe how jinn are similar to humans: they eat, drink, and reproduce sexually, and they can even have sexual relations with humans. I have discussed this topic elsewhere. From an anthropological perspective, this raises questions about the offspring that result from such unions, the hybridization that occurs, and the very nature of the jinn themselves. The jinn have subtle bodies, but these subtle bodies can also become fully dense.

The idea I want to suggest here is that the presence of the jinn discreetly sets the stage for the justification of divine retribution.

The mention of the jinn is ultimately directed at humans, highlighting their unstable choices. On a general level, the Quran affirms the predestination of human actions. However, on a more practical, legal level, humans are constantly invited to choose how they act, and it is upon these choices that they will be judged.

At every moment in life, humans are faced with decisions: each action, whether it be eating, traveling, or engaging in relationships, can be done either to please God or without considering Him at all—perhaps even in direct transgression of His commands. Therefore, every human act becomes an act of consciousness, an intimate engagement of the self.

However, this internal struggle was difficult, if not impossible, to express in psychological terms in 7th-century Arabia. At that time, the concept of individual identity as we understand it today did not fully exist. Instead, personal identity was deeply divided—between religious obligations, social ties, and purely individualistic tendencies.

One of the functions of the jinn, I believe, is to symbolize this multiplicity of inner voices within each human being.

Of course, we know that jinn are often depicted as tempters. Some are malevolent but I will not focus on them. Instead, I am interested in those jinn who embody the possibility of evading divine order. Unlike those who fully align with Iblis, most jinn are not inherently sinful. Rather, they are like humans: selfish and unstable. Because of this, humans can negotiate with them—and this is precisely where major temptations arise, as explored in the occult sciences.

People can contact jinn for divination. The Quran mentions that jinn are unable to reach the lower heavens, but even after the advent of Islam, they continued to be consulted for divination and various magical operations.

The hypothesis I want to put forward is that the anthropology of the Quran distinguishes three elements within the human being: the body, an element that opens toward God (referred to as "light"), and a vital element that seeks individual advantage (sometimes associated with the nafs, or lower self). In this perspective, the jinn can be understood as the representation of this vital instinct.

This is not a psychological interpretation, but rather a psychologization. There is a well-known hadith, recorded in Sahih Muslim, where the Prophet states: "Each one of you has a qarin (a companion) among the jinn." In another variant, it is said that humans also have a qarin among the angels.

The Prophet was asked: "Even you, O Messenger of God?" He replied: "Yes, but my jinn has become Muslim (or has submitted, depending on the interpretation) and no longer tempts me."

I believe this hadith provides an important key to understanding the role of the jinn.

The jinn, ultimately, represent the human tendency toward temptation, but through this temptation, they enable the person to achieve faith. Just as the Prophet was able to subdue or convert his jinn, each believer is also called to negotiate with their jinn and to earn their faith through struggle. Faith would be meaningless if it did not involve this constant negotiation with an internal presence.

Ibn Arabi, who wrote extensively on this topic, argued that humans and jinn together form a complete creation. The jinn, being made of fire and air, are proud, unstable, and constantly moving. Humans, made of clay and water, are more grounded and intelligent. The ultimate goal, from a mystical perspective, is to synthesize these two aspects—to achieve the state of the "Perfect Human."

In this sense, jinn play an important role not only in theological and magical contexts but also in a broader, mystical understanding of human destiny.